

How Old Is John?

What is the Truth about Old Uncle John Shell, of Greasy Creek, Kentucky? Is He "The Oldest Living Man" or Only a Youngster of 95 to 100 Summers?

INVESTIGATOR'S REPORT

THE age-old puzzle, "How old is Ann?" is now put into the shade by the question lately agitated in the public press as to "How old is John?"

Old "Uncle" Johnny Shell, the Kentucky mountaineer, who paid a visit to the Kentucky State Fair at Louisville last fall, has become famous over night as a result of this controversy.

Such papers as the "New York Herald," the "Literary Digest," and other periodicals of national circulation, have printed his picture, with comments on the question at issue.

So much interest has been shown in the matter, that a special investigator was sent to Greasy Creek, Kentucky, by The Chattanooga Medicine Company (whose medicine—Thedford's Black-Draught Liver Medicine—had been used in the Shell family for many years) in order to get more information on the subject.

The investigator's report is given on another column of this page. The result of this investigation seems to show, on testimony of friends and neighbors, that John Shell is about 112 years old, that his health is good for a man of his age, and that his mind is clearer than that of the average centenarian.

A statement from his grandson (A. H. Shell) regarding the use of Thedford's Black-Draught, by John Shell himself, is given at the foot of this page.

Facts vs. Fiction

JOHNSHELL is without doubt the most remarkable centenarian I have seen, and he is about the eighth I have met," says our investigator. "His memory is wonderful. The nearest that he and his family can come to his age is 112 years. His family has never claimed him to be over that age. The tax records that were burned in the court house at Harlan gave the date of his birth, as near as they could make it out, as September, 1808. He also counts from the age of his first wife, who died at the age of 107.

"John Shell cannot read or write, but for many years he was an expert maker of flint-lock rifles. John Shell rides, marked with his private mark just behind the lock, are prized by collectors.

"In order to get a consensus of opinion as to his probable age, I thought it best to secure statements and affidavits from members of the family and neighbors, who have known him for many years. I therefore secured such statements from Judge A. B. Cornett, T. H. Howard, attorney-at-law, and W. B. Kelly, ex-United States marshal, and others. These are among the most substantial and reliable men of Kentucky."

Extracts from their statements are given below:

OVER 100, SAYS W. B. KELLY.
I have known Uncle Johnny Shell for years. I first played with him a good deal, about 10 years ago. From the age of 20, when I started to work, I stayed with him, and the time that has elapsed since, I would judge him to be a good deal over 100 years old.

W. B. KELLY,
Ex-United States Marshal.
Subscribed and sworn to before me this 23rd day of April, 1920.
M. G. SMITH, Notary Public, Harlan Co., Ky.

SHELL FAMILY RECORD SAYS 112.
My Aunt, Mrs. Martha Garthorn says that the date in her Bible, containing grandpa's age, was September 12, 1808. I have every reason to believe that she speaks the truth. My father, W. C. Shell, says this is the truth so far as he has ever known; also my uncle, A. B. Shell.

A. B. SHELL,
G. W. HOWARD, County Court Clerk.

AT LEAST 110, SAYS T. S. WARD.
I will be 81 years old the 15th of June, 1920. I was born and raised in Harlan County, Kentucky. In 1840, I got Johnny Shell when he was about 40 years old. I was working the Confederate army and met "Uncle Johnny." He was then 110 years old, and he is a much older man than I am. Most every one in Harlan County knows the man, and will take my word for anything I say. I would not make a statement unless I believed it to be true.

T. S. WARD,
Subscribed and sworn to before me, this 23rd day of April, 1920.
M. G. SMITH, Notary Public, Harlan Co., Ky.

ATTORNEY HOWARD SAYS OVER 100.
In different conversations with John Shell, he often told about coming to Kentucky with his father in the summer of 1814, and that they camped where the town of Harlan, Ky., is now located, and that at that time he was 12 years old. In abstracting old land papers I found one where an entry was made by John Shell's father in the year 1816, in the neighborhood where he now lives. I have every reason to believe John Shell is a good deal over 100 years old.

T. H. HOWARD, Attorney at Law.
Subscribed and sworn to before me, this 23rd day of April, 1920.
M. G. SMITH, Notary Public, Harlan Co., Ky.

OVER 100 AND AN HONEST MAN.
I have known Johnny Shell for about 25 years. I have sold him goods for 20 years. W. B. Kelly told of a man Smith. He and Shell grew up together, about the same age. If Smith had lived, he would be a little over a hundred now. Richard Whinn, who was raised a few miles from Shell, says Shell has turned 100. I talked to Shell last year. He knew me and talked to me as intelligently as I ever heard him. I have always found John Shell an honest man.

R. C. HOWARD,
JUDGE CORNETT SAYS ALL OF 109.
I have known "Uncle Johnny" Shell for 25 or 30 years. I have known of him as an old, old man. From all reports from the few who lived here when he came here at the age of 12, he is now at least 109 years old, and I believe older. I have talked with him in the last year and he seemed to be intelligent and just as rational as I ever saw him.

(Judge) A. B. CORNETT, Harlan Co., Ky.
"OLDER THAN MY MOTHER, 104."
I have known "Uncle Johnny" Shell all my life. I am almost 68. I would place his age at 104. Johnny Shell was older than my mother, and she would have been 104, had she lived till now.

E. G. LEWIS,
In justice to John Shell and his family, it should be said that neither he nor they have ever claimed the extreme old age that was given in some of the reports published in the daily press. A story of the kind grows in the telling, and the desire for something startling to make good reading is no doubt the cause for the interesting fiction (founded on fact) that has been published about old "Uncle" Johnny Shell.

Facts, however, in many cases, are just as interesting as fiction, and we have endeavored in this article to give the facts as we have been able to find them.

THE CHATTANOOGA MEDICINE CO.



John Shell turning a grindstone for his five-year-old son, Albert, to sharpen a jack-knife.

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JOHN SHELL AND FAMILY.
John Shell, his second wife and five-year-old son, also A. H. Shell, grandson of John Shell, his wife and their two daughters.

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OLD "UNCLE" JOHN SHELL.
A Remarkable Old Mountaineer.
Now Living at Greasy Creek, Kentucky.
Was thought by some to be 131 years old, but a full investigation does not disclose any reliable records going back so far.



The beneath picture shows Uncle John Shell's home at Greasy Creek, Kentucky, where he has lived for 46 years. His first wife died here, at the age of 107 years.

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Statement by John Shell's Grandson

A. H. Shell, aged 45, of Chappell, Kentucky, grandson of John Shell, whose picture is shown in the group at top of this page, authorized publication of the following statement:

"My grandfather has lived to a remarkable age. When a young man, he took very little medicine. Of late years he has needed medicine and my wife has looked after it for him. He needed something as a laxative and to keep his liver acting, so she sends to the store for

Thedford's Black-Draught

and makes him a tea from that and it keeps him in splendid shape."

